

Microteaching

By Essam Hanna Wahba

Although microteaching has long been used as a professional development tool in inservice teacher training programs, teacher trainees seldom take this training seriously. At least this is the situation in Egypt. This attitude greatly diminishes the usefulness of microteaching, which can be beneficial.

Microteaching helps teachers to better understand the processes of teaching and learning. It provides teachers with ample opportunities to explore and reflect on their own and others' teaching styles and to acquire new teaching techniques.

Microteaching can be defined as a training context in which a teacher's situation has been reduced in scope or simplified in some systematic ways. There are three ways in which teaching may be scaled down:

1. The teacher's task may be simplified and made very specific.
2. The length of the lesson may be shortened.
3. The size of class may be reduced.

This article addresses microteaching as an inservice tool, and how school-based microteaching can be beneficial to all involved in the learning and teaching processes.

Origin and Development

Microteaching, as a training technique, began at Stanford University in the early 1970s. It was first applied to teaching science, but later it was introduced to language teaching. The theoretical basis for the Stanford approach was initially related to the psychological theory of behaviorism. However, it is more valid to see microteaching as a technique for professional reflection than as a technique for shaping behavior.

Why Microteaching?

Besides being an effective technique for professional growth, microteaching, as a tool for reflection, helps teachers scrutinize their own teaching in order to discover their strengths and weaknesses. Reflecting on their own teaching styles enables teachers to focus on certain areas of teaching and to view them from different perspectives.

It also makes teachers conscious of developing their own skills and strategies in order to understand their teaching. Through microteaching teachers are able to pursue self-initiated, self-directed, and self-observed growth. This growth comes about because teachers are able to criticize, either positively or negatively, their own work.

Stages of Microteaching

There are four distinct stages of microteaching. In the briefing, teachers receive information on the skill to be practiced and the method to be used. During the teaching stage, the trainee teaches the microlesson, and if possible, the micro-lesson is videotaped or audiorecorded. In the analysis and discussion period, the trainee's microlesson is reviewed, discussed, analyzed, and evaluated. Finally, in the reteaching stage, the trainee reteaches the microlesson, applying those points raised during the discussion and analysis.

Preparing a microlesson

The microlesson can be prepared by an individual or a group of teacher trainees. The objective and procedures of the microlessons should be clear. A variety of aids may be used to facilitate teaching the microlessons. These may include cards, actions, gestures, and drawings on the board. The lesson should last from five to ten minutes.

Teaching a microlesson

This is the interactive stage of microteaching where the trainee puts into practice what the group has planned. The teacher's task in microteaching is to practice one skill at a time. The size of the class is usually fewer than ten students, sometimes only four or five. Students may be real students or fellow trainees.

Microteaching should be in a school setting, because it allows teachers to use real students. Also, school-based microteaching creates a positive atmosphere among participants.

Although the lesson is short, it should generate useful discussions. During the teaching, fellow trainees take notes that they can use during reflective discussions. This is especially useful if the students are also trainees because the experience provides insights into learning problems. To reduce the pressure on the teacher, the role of the supervisors should be minimized. They should not interfere with the microlesson in any way.

Observation during the microlesson is a learning experience. Fellow teachers should prepare for this task by selecting a focus and purpose, and a method of data collection and by cooperating with those involved.

Following up the microlesson

The follow-up should include analyzing, discussing, and interpreting the data and the experiences acquired, and reflecting on the new experiences.

Conclusion

Some people argue that microteaching is both a risky and costly procedure. It is risky in that trainees or inservice teachers may be exposed to criticism by their colleagues and/or supervisors. There are also costs involved both in the resources that may be used and the amount of time the microteaching absorbs. However, microteaching should be considered a positive experience because it aids in the gradual development of professional expertise and minimizes the risk of failure in the classroom.

Bibliography

Richards, J. and C. Lockhart. 1994. Reflective teaching in second language classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wallace, M. 1991. Training foreign language teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wajnryb, R. 1992. Classroom observation tasks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Essam Hanna Wahba teaches English as a foreign language in secondary schools in Egypt.